

Target: Reduce Substance Abuse to Reduce Crime

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Data from the Bureau of Justice Assistance/NIJ Drug Use Forecasting Program, in which arrestees in sample cities are tested for drugs, clearly reveal that most people are on drugs as they are being booked into jail. The study was conducted on those charged with non-drug offenses, and the results were astounding. Three-quarters of the samples taken nationally were positive for cocaine, heroin, and/or marijuana.

The drug epidemic is growing, arrests are increasing, and substance abuse education and intervention are lacking. Without a doubt, drug dependency is the root cause of much of the crime in our communities. Arrest and confinement of drug users provide an opportunity to help them break their drug addictions.

Time in pre-trial detention is often idle. It is a waste of time and taxpayers' dollars to allow a pre-trial defendant to sit in jail for days, weeks, or months waiting for

eventual release or movement to prison and not do anything to assist that person in self-improvement.

Broward County, Florida, is located in a major drug area. The police are doing their part by arresting sellers and buyers. The Broward County Sheriff's Office has a national, perhaps international, reputation for cracking down on crime and the criminal. Its Organized Crime Department and Department of Law Enforcement are indeed tough on crime, especially drug crimes. The Department of Detention is joining these crime-fighting efforts by targeting the reduction of substance abuse.

The Department of Detention consists of three jails, with a total population of about 3,000. An average of 140 defendants a day are booked into the jail system.

Programs conducted at the jail thus have the opportunity to affect thousands of people.

The jail system has two ongoing programs that target drug dependency reduction. The first, the In Jail Substance Abuse Education and Intervention Program,

is an ongoing program within the jail system. In this program, several counselors screen interested applicants and conduct counseling and education with a volunteer group of about 150 prisoners. This small but effective program has the potential of affecting about 400 prisoners; however, additional funds would be required to hire additional staff if the program were to be expanded to that size.

A major problem encountered by the in-jail program is the fact that most people are released from jail before they complete the course. Participants lack the opportunity to link to a community-based program in order to maintain their momentum in breaking the drug dependency cycle. Indeed, a few of those who have completed the course and are released have attempted to obtain assistance from the jail counselors

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from the outside. Unfortunately, however, our staff must direct its attention to the in-custody cases.

The Department's second program is conducted by the Pre Trial Services Unit. It has been active for several years in identifying and recommending to the court new prisoners appropriate for controlled release to the community while awaiting trial. At present, controls involve simply a weekly phone call by the defendant to his/her counselor at the Unit.

Many of the defendants in the Pre Trial Services release program are substance abusers, but no condition is placed on their release requiring them to obtain assistance in breaking in their drug use patterns. Indeed, even if such conditions were imposed, there is no agency available in the community to work with them.

The storefront operation will target both pre trial release defendants and offenders released from the jail's substance abuse program.

In order to become more effective, both the In Jail Substance Abuse Education and Intervention Program and the Pre Trial Unit require additional funds to add personnel and obtain additional equipment. Pre Trial Services, for example, needs additional interviewers to identify more defendants eligible for the program. The program also needs an enforcement element that could provide visual checks of defendants' behavior, along with an

electronic monitoring system to reinforce weekly phone calls. Certified law enforcement deputies would immediately take into custody any defendants who failed to comply with all the conditions of release. Defendants who are drug abusers would then be required to seek assistance and to participate in substance abuse education as a condition of their release.

Rather than complaining about the fact that only a few overcrowded substance abuse treatment facilities and programs exist in the community, the Broward County Sheriff, with the support of the County Commission, is working to create such a facility and program. In order to support the Pre Trial Services expansion and the In Jail Substance Abuse Education and

Intervention process, a community-based "storefront" unit will be created as a focal point in

the county. The unit will maintain the released defendant in a program of acculturation by supporting attendance in programs to reduce substance abuse.

Broward County Commissioners have endorsed the concept of the storefront drug counseling program and are considering a proposal for joint funding by the county and the Sheriff's Department. Additional

funds are being sought through grant proposals to other agencies.

The storefront community drug counseling and intervention center will be established as a support base from which defendants can seek assistance with their drug addictions. This operation will target both pre trial release defendants and those released from the jail's substance abuse intervention program. Operations of this type have proven successful in the past and are still viable as a means of continuing to support the process of breaking the drug cycle.

We view the new Drug Counseling and Intervention Center as an important part of our crime prevention program. We know that drug use can and does cause criminal acts to be committed. By breaking the drug dependency cycle, we hope to reduce the incidence of crime among the target group.

Linking jail defendants on release with pre trial defendants in a single support group, screened and carefully monitored, should bring positive results. This project is aimed at attacking not just crime, but the cause of crime.

For more information, contact Nick Navarro, Sheriff, Broward County, Florida, or Ralph S. Bates, Acting Director, Broward County Department of Detention. ■